

Assessment of the Linkage Program To Enhance Local Planning

The Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program (the “Linkage” Program) has been successful in linking land use and transportation decision making in the Capital District. However, enhancing the program could allow CDTC to distribute funds for more strategic planning efforts that support the policies and principles of New Visions as well as other initiatives such as NYS Quality Communities.

As it stands today, the Linkage Program has funded 36 local land use and transportation planning studies that have amounted to over \$1.6 million in funding commitment, including \$400,000 in local contributions. Funding is limited to conceptual design only; detailed design activities are not eligible for linkage funds. The majority of the studies have been small (under \$50,000) but have been very well received by study sponsors. There are very few funding opportunities for local planning efforts in New York State and the Capital District Transportation Committee is fortunate to be able to offer such a program in a time of fiscal crisis for nearly all units of government.

Program Objectives

The first 36 studies were selected based on very basic selection criteria. More importantly, the sponsors were only given three broad program objectives under which to develop project ideas. The current program objectives are:

- 1) The Linkage program is intended to help integrate land use and transportation decisions by providing staff or consultant support to local initiatives.
- 2) Through a direct solicitation of candidate activities, the Linkage program is expected to be responsive to local needs.
- 3) Through connection to CDTC’s New Visions plan, the Linkage program will also help assure that local efforts are compatible with regional principles and implement regional strategies.

The program objectives allow for a great deal of flexibility in the development of study ideas and the types of studies that could be eligible for funding. However, many sponsors are unaware of what the regional principles are and how they apply to linkage studies. Therefore, it is appropriate to include additional language in the Linkage Program guidelines to help potential sponsors understand the New Visions principles.

CDTC staff has summarized the New Visions principles and policies in the following manner. First, New Visions contains 25 planning and investment principles which are to be followed by CDTC in all of its actions. There are also ten adopted strategies and 43 adopted actions that represent CDTC’s implementation program for the plan. All of the principles, strategies and actions are described below.

CDTC'S 25 ADOPTED PLANNING & INVESTMENT *PRINCIPLES*

The following is a list of the principles adopted in CDTC's *New Visions for Capital District Transportation* plan. CDTC attempts to respect these principles in all its actions.

PRESERVE AND MANAGE

Improve System Performance

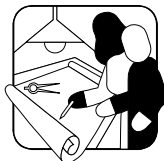
- 1) CDTC is committed to the maintenance, repair and renewal of the existing highway and bridge system in a cost-effective manner that protects and enhances rideability, public safety and accessibility.
- 2) Funding for appropriate repair and renewal will be based on the function and condition of the facility -- not ownership.
- 3) Encouraging bicycle and pedestrian travel is a socially, economically and environmentally responsible approach to improving the performance of our transportation system.
- 4) In addition to supporting desired land settlement patterns, transit service serves multiple objectives in the Capital District:
 - 4 to contribute to congestion management, air quality and energy savings;
 - 4 to offer an alternative travel mode to reduce dependence on the auto; and
 - 4 to provide essential mobility for those who do not operate a private vehicle.
- 5) The needs of the older driver will be considered as transportation facilities are maintained and rehabilitated.
- 6) More efficient utilization of existing vehicles/programs to provide for special transportation needs is preferable to fleet expansion, and will provide more choices for users.

Manage Congestion

- 7) Management of demand is preferable to accommodation of single-occupant vehicle demand growth.
- 8) Cost-effective operational actions are preferable to physical highway capacity expansion.
- 9) Capital projects designed to provide significant physical highway capacity expansion are appropriate congestion management actions only under compelling conditions.
- 10) Significant physical highway capacity additions carried out in the context of major infrastructure renewal are appropriate only under compelling conditions. (The revised design approach reaches a determination of facility design through a risk assessment [tradeoff analysis] that focuses on the opportunity cost of selecting alternative designs.)
- 11) Incident management is essential to effective congestion management.

Protect Our Investment

- 12) Managing traffic flows on the Capital District expressway and arterial system is critical for both economic and social reasons.
- 13) Major capital projects must have a plan for operating budgets for the life of the project.
- 14) Maintaining the health and improving the efficiency of the existing freight facilities in the region through public/private partnerships is a high priority.



DEVELOP THE REGION'S POTENTIAL

Build Upon Our Strengths

- 15) The transportation system of the Capital District is an important part of the region's attractiveness.
- 16) Transportation investments will help preserve and enhance the Capital District's existing urban form, infrastructure, and quality of place. The Capital District already has many unique attributes that other regions strive for:
 - 4 The region is a collection of communities that work together and that possess a livable, community scale.
 - 4 The region is multi-centered with the most intensive suburban development in the center of the region rather than at the fringe. Suburban and urban areas depend on each other for jobs, housing, and cultural activities.
 - 4 Traditional transit corridors link urban centers.
 - 4 The region's modest growth rate is a strength because it affords the time and the opportunity to put in place plans and policies that encourage growth in harmony with the region's objectives.
 - 4 The region is endowed with a diversity of parks, a relative abundance of open space and a wealth of recreation and tourism attractions.

Use Transportation Investment as a Tool

- 17) Transit facilities and services can be an essential element of the social, economic and cultural fabric of a metropolitan region if supportive policies and investments are in place.
- 18) Neighborhood-based local planning efforts are important to the success of an overall regional plan that emphasizes livable communities.

LINK TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE

Encourage Local Land Use Management

- 19) Land use planning and management is critical to the protection of transportation system investment.
- 20) Design of street layout and location of complementary uses can create a pedestrian scale and provide increased accessibility without compromising the attractiveness of development.

Link Transportation Investments to Land Use Planning

- 21) Transportation investments will encourage residential and commercial development to locate within an Urban Service Area defined for the Capital District.
- 22) Transportation investments will not encourage development in environmentally sensitive areas and will help to preserve rural character.
- 23) Arterial management guidelines will be flexible enough to deal with the Capital District's various roadway types and the specific land use patterns surrounding them.

PLAN AND BUILD FOR ALL MODES

- 24) CDTC's planning efforts will be comprehensive enough to encompass all modes, including air, water, freight, intercity and local transit, pedestrian and bicycle.
- 25) Possible bicycle/pedestrian-related improvements will be considered from the perspective of **developing a system** -- not just based on whether a particular facility is currently used.

CDTC'S 10 ADOPTED STRATEGIES & 43 ADOPTED ACTIONS

The following is a list of the strategies and actions adopted in CDTC's *New Visions for Capital District Transportation* plan. They represent CDTC's intended implementation program.

MAINTAIN INFRASTRUCTURE IN GOOD CONDITION AND FOCUS ON PRIORITY TREATMENT NETWORKS FOR OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

- 1) Make the Capital District transportation system safer.
- 2) Continue adequate highway and bridge maintenance efforts.
- 3) Carry out an effective highway and bridge rehabilitation and reconstruction program.
- 4) Maintain transit equipment and facilities in a state of good repair.
- 5) Embrace a "risk assessment" approach to evaluating capacity-improving aspects in infrastructure project design.
- 6) Establish priority treatment networks for improvement beyond basic infrastructure renewal.
- 7) Adopt an access management policy for the arterial priority network.
- 8) Explore changes in road ownership as a way to better align infrastructure funding with function.

PRO-ACTIVELY PLAN VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

- 9) Prepare and maintain a comprehensive Regional Development Plan.
- 10) Establish an Urban Service Area.
- 11) Provide funding for and staff participation in community-based planning.
- 12) Develop access management plans for all priority network arterials.
- 13) Support local planning board consideration of the regional transportation impacts of development decisions.
- 14) Improve site design practices.
- 15) Elevate consideration of transportation alternatives in siting facilities that primarily serve elderly and handicapped populations.
- 16) Improve delivery access for commercial vehicles.
- 17) Establish a program for transportation projects directed explicitly at community enhancement or regional economic development.

REACH OUT FOR FULL PARTICIPATION

- 18) Emphasize public participation in transportation planning, programming and implementation.

DESIGN EFFECTIVE FACILITIES

- 19) Improve continuity between planning, programming and implementation.
- 20) Mitigate congestion only when such improvements are consistent with New Visions principles.
- 21) Routinely make road projects bicycle-, pedestrian- and transit-friendly.
- 22) Expand the regional road network to include greater use of service roads and collector streets.

DEVELOP INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS AND MANAGE TRAFFIC INCIDENTS EFFECTIVELY

- 23) Implement Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) on the priority network.
- 24) Implement the Expressway Incident Management Plan.

SUPPORT INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION

- 25) Improve intermodal passenger connections throughout the region.
- 26) Support intermodal transport of goods in and through the Capital District.
- 27) Improve surface access to the Port of Albany.
- 28) Implement improved surface access to the Albany International Airport.
- 29) Eliminate at-grade railroad crossings at every opportunity.

PROVIDE APPROPRIATE TRANSIT SERVICE

- 30) Restructure transit service to meet 21st century needs.
- 31) Support transit through design of the built environment and the use of technology.

TREAT ALL MODES FAIRLY IN THE CAPITAL PROGRAM

- 32) Direct transportation improvements and services to support New Visions concepts.
- 33) Provide funding for implementation of small, cost-effective improvements.
- 34) Develop Class I bicycle facilities in major travel corridors of the region.

ENHANCE DEMAND MANAGEMENT

- 35) Continue and expand demand management initiatives.
- 36) Engage New York State as a full partner parking management and transit promotion.
- 37) Consider highway pricing (particularly congestion pricing) and broad parking policies (including cashing out).

SECURE ADEQUATE FUNDING TO FULLY IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

- 38) Build a coalition to advocate for regional transportation projects.
- 39) Explore local funding mechanisms for implementation of the plan.
- 40) Actively pursue public/private partnerships that leverage the use of public funds.
- 41) Increase the use of mitigation fees to finance transportation improvements.
- 42) Include demand management and transit support in development-financed traffic mitigation programs.
- 43) Explore changes in funding rules and programs to better align funding with function.

As can be seen, a number of the existing New Visions policies and principles clearly point toward more sustainable land use planning including designing for a pedestrian scale, focusing transportation investments to encourage commercial and residential development in an urban service area and identifying that land use planning and management is critical to the protection of transportation investments. All of this should be made clear to potential Linkage study sponsors.

Options:

- *Update the linkage program to reflect the existing New Visions principles. This could be implemented in the 2005-06 solicitation for the Linkage program.*
- *Expand the program objectives to more clearly articulate desired project types to allow for more strategic use of the funds.*

Study Selection Criteria

The criteria used to select studies for Linkage funding has been fairly basic. In the first two years of the program, all of the requested studies could be funded with the available funds. In the most recent two years of the program, CDTC staff has had to develop more formal evaluation criteria as the number of requests exceeded the available funding. The current selection criteria are described as follows:

“Projects will be selected for funding only if they appear to contribute to implementation of the broad New Visions concepts and are also well supported locally through complementary activities and/or funding commitments. Should there be more funds requested than funds available, the selection process will include efforts to fund the most promising studies which most directly address New Visions concepts, provide for geographic balance and reflect a range of project types.”

Options:

- *Refine the study selection criteria to allow for a more structured review of proposals as the demand for Linkage program funds increases over time. Consideration should be given to enhancing the evaluation criteria to more specifically benefit studies that strictly follow New Visions principles. This would not only raise the standards of the studies funded but will greatly assist CDTC’s Planning Committee when they review the staff recommendations.*
- *Additional criteria could be considered including utilizing the urban service area as an area targeted for additional planning assistance, linking a proposed study to an identified need in a comprehensive plan, consideration of “form-based” zoning options or through some other local initiative.*

Overall Program Options

- *Consideration should be given to developing a guidebook (somewhat modeled after the Enhancement Program guidebook) that clearly articulates best practices, additional resources, zoning text, eligible activities, program guidelines and administrative responsibilities including documentation of study selection criteria. A guidebook should not only include CDTC's policies and principles but should also integrate other statewide planning initiatives such as the Quality Communities program and the New York State Energy Plan.*
- *Develop a workshop for potential or current Linkage study sponsors to clearly articulate roles and responsibilities as well as the program guidelines.*
- *Consider integrating the staff of CDRPC into the Linkage program in a more clearly defined manner. This could include review of the scope of a given project, participation in a study advisory committee or closer data coordination with the consultant teams.*
- *Utilize the Memorandum of Understanding to serve as a "compact" that communities must sign on to before they apply for Linkage program funds. This could be modeled after the Dutchess County Greenway Compact Program.*
- *Better utilize summary materials to further promote the program including the Linkage program summary pamphlet, the project summary materials and update of the CDTC website for completed studies and current information on the program.*
- *Better utilize the Community and Transportation Planning Group to enhance the Linkage program guidance but to also serve as a sounding board for a dialogue about local planning challenges. This group could be vital in creating a site design handbook or a Linkage program Guidebook. If a site design handbook is pursued (outside of the Linkage program), it should also include examples of best practice zoning text. The handbook should also discuss the regional implications of local projects to some degree. This could become part of a standard materials package for planning board members.*

This group should also be utilized to document existing services for local planners. What is offered by the state, counties or other organizations that could be helpful for local planning? What is the existing support structure for local planning? What services do counties, NYS DOS, NYS DOT and other agencies offer? What kind of assistance could you expect?

- *The urban service area has largely been utilized for the urban/rural designations in the functional classification system, in terms of CDTC's planning activities. This "boundary" could be used to help focus a large percentage of Linkage funds to studies within the urban service area. In essence, it could serve as the first steps*

toward an urban growth boundary. Special consideration would have to be given to the special circumstances of rural villages in the Linkage program.

- *Consider incorporating the SEQR throughout the study process, especially if land use changes are recommended. Would need to discuss with the state how SEQR relates to these planning studies, especially when the municipality would like to formally adopt the findings of the study.*